

NO SLEEP TILL Sunnydale

RAQUEL HILL WENT ALONG TO THE *BUFFY* THE VAMPIRE SLAYER CONVENTION TO SEE THE STARS AND MEET THE FANS.

FOR FANS, BY FANS

As a *Buffy* fan, this smallish two-day convention, held at a hotel in Sydney's King's Cross, promised much: mingling with the show's stars - Nicholas Brendan (Xander) and Mercedes McNab (Harmony) [McNab dropped out at the last minute]; stocking up on *Buffy* merchandise; and generally mixing with equally enlightened and impassioned fans. Could it deliver?

THE FANS

There's no easily definable *Buffy* demographic. You're as likely to find a pre-teen watching as you are a pensioner. The show about a sexy young vampire slayer has a very broad appeal. While fans of the show cite its cool characters, attractive cast, complex plotting and ass-kicking action as reasons to switch on, *Buffy* offers viewers a weekly window into a fantasy world in which ordinary people (albeit one happens to be "the Chosen One") triumph over demonic villainy. The perfect escape from life's doldrums. Looking round the convention the huge proportion of middle-aged women seemed to bear my theory out. Despite the stereotype, nobody dressed up for the occasion.

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Nicholas Brendan fronted the fans for two Q&A sessions. There are three main rules that you need to know when asking a question to an actor at a *Buffy* convention: 1. If you have a valid question about a confusing aspect of the plot, do not ask it. You will be howled down. Case in point: "Faith came down last time the slayer died, does that mean there is now another slayer running around somewhere?" A resounding "NO!" from the audience suitably shamed the questioner. 2. To avoid making such a blunder you have to know every episode by heart, including title, script, and names of the particular nasties in that episode. 3. You must have studied every aspect of the actor in question's personal life and laugh knowingly when he answers any questions regarding these. If you have no idea, laugh knowingly anyway. Question time





Looking Buff.

see who's the biggest fan. Enter the fray at your own risk.

If you must ask a question make it a good one. Questions such as "Does Dawn die?" "Does Spike die?" "Who do you like kissing the best?" (No, no and Alison, in case you were wondering) were well regarded. Admittedly I was interested to learn that Brendan entered the acting world because of his stutter. We also learnt that he was so nervous on his first day on set that he hyperventilated and passed out.

SEE THE SHOW, BUY THE TOOTHBRUSH

Buffy has become a merchandising monolith. These days you can buy everything from figurines to sheet sets. Though the convention wasn't the smorgasbord of *Buffy* stuff I was hoping for, the auction was an eye-opener into the nature of fandom. The auction started with a T-shirt that had been for sale in the dealer's room for \$25. Bidding began slowly, until a confident punter yelled out he'd pay a hundred if Brendan actually put it on. Encouraged by the baying crowd, Brendan stripped off his shirt, and started a major bidding war. The T-shirt eventually sold for \$180.

Perhaps the most telling episode of the two days was the sale of an advertisement for milk featuring Buffy and another featuring Angel. A staid middle-aged woman was outbidding a young teenage girl who had saved up every cent of her pocket money. The teen was madly trying to co-ordinate a consortium bid with her buddies when the auctioneer asked the woman if she realised who she was bidding against. The woman replied "Yes. I know I have a problem."

THE FUTURE OF BUFFY

Buffy, produced by Fox, jumped from the WB network - it's home for five years - to its rival UPN when UPN outbid WB for the rights

to distribute the series. The split was apparently acrimonious. This raises the question of whether *Angel* and *Buffy* can crossover in the future. But creator Joss Whedon has apparently not ruled it out. Brendan did however break the news that next year will be the last year of filming for *Buffy* as Whedon is keen to focus on other projects, and the cast is not willing to do another season without him.

Now that UPN has taken over from WB, we should expect to see further liberalisation in the show's portrayal of gender and sexuality (yes more lesbian sex), higher production values, and more elaborate stunts. UPN are apparently putting around \$2.3-million into every episode. Upon arrival at UPN the cast were given a Cartier watch and Krystal champagne - at WB they received a framed cast picture for the 100th episode.

Despite its immense popularity, *Buffy* has never been nominated for an Emmy. Brendan believes it's because they don't know where to put it, adding, "It's a drama, but it's a comedy and sci-fi. It's done so well because it's so many shows rolled into one but they get freaked out by it. It's not *Dawson's Creek*." This was met with an instantaneous "Thank god".

INTO THE NIGHT

At the end of the day the "Best of Both Worlds Convention" offered more insights into fandom than into *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, but most fans got something out of it. As I left, a highly elated fan, barely containing his excitement, ran past with his bag of goodies yelling at me. "I just spent every cent I had, but it was worth it!" Time to start saving for the next one.

Fans with make up.



Fanning the flame.



Stars without make up.

